

Kent County Testimony

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Michigan State House of Representatives
Appropriations Committee
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Good afternoon. I am Matthew VanZetten – a Business Analyst with the Kent County Administrator's Office. Wayman Britt, our Assistant County Administrator, wishes he could be here today to testify on the County's behalf, but is unable due to another key meeting. We are offering Kent County's support of Senate Bills 973, 974 and 975 which are sponsored by Senator Caswell.

SB 973 creates a Child Welfare Partnership Council. In essence, this creates a statutorily mandated body whereby all of the child welfare partners – counties, DHS, private agencies, courts, DCH and MDE as well as the public – are required to regularly communicate with one another about the needs of children and families in the child welfare system. Some may state that such a law is not needed for this council to exist. But the reality is that the child welfare system is very complicated with many different funding partners, mandates, risks and service providers. By putting such a Council in statute, there is a guaranteed mechanism in Michigan for all parties to communicate and learn, which we believe is necessary as the State continues to work toward improving child welfare outcomes.

SB974 ensures that courts can hold private agencies in contempt of court. This equals the treatment of DHS and private agency staff in the eyes of the Court.

Last, SB975 moves our State toward a performance based model of child welfare service. Over five years ago, Wayman testified in the Senate Families, Seniors, and Human Services Committee for the need to improve data transparency, and replace Michigan's outdated SACWIS system in order to allow us to measure outcomes and improve performance. A great deal has happened in the past five years, and we have learned more about the complexities of the child welfare system. Its funding models and formulas. Its incentives and disincentives.

A few years ago, the DHS Appropriation Bill required in Section 515 that DHS in partnership with Kent County, the Court and private agencies create a 100% private model of community cased care. Key to that plan was the ability to braid funds across categorical funding, measure outcomes, and create a case rate to free providers so they could provide the right service, at the right time, in the right dosage to children. Fortunately, we were able to work with network180, our CMH authority, and our community's federal System of Care grant to model this plan based on national best practices.

The FY2014 DHS appropriation bill required that DHS create a performance based model of care, and the Section 515 Plan served as the base for this work. The State's Performance Based Plan was

created in consultation by many, and approved by a wide variety stakeholders in March. SB975 emerges from that journey.

The bill itself provides DHS, private agencies and Kent County with a few key tools necessary to implement a performance based system.

1. It allows the Department to create a prospective case rate which will ensure that children can receive the right service, at the right time, in the right dosage and are not dependent on the State for having procured a certain service. Local case managers and providers have a responsibility to find or create necessary services to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children. This creates the mechanism that allows this to happen.
2. It takes any financial risk this change may propose away from counties by capping its contribution at the average of the past five years 'out of home care' amounts; allows counties to participate in the child care fund in-home care programs; and maintains a county contribution to the State for needed federal match funds.
3. It ensures that juvenile justice services are not affected by any of the changes and are maintained within the jurisdiction of courts.

SB975 only affects counties of a certain population size. Concerns have been raised about how might other counties participate in the provisions of 975 if they want to. Or that the population thresholds might be changed to mandate participation of counties that do not want to participate in its framework. Yet others have said all of SB975 can be done via contract.

In general, it is our belief that before we can run, we all need to learn how to stand up, walk, jog, skip, and maybe even tumble and get back up. Basically, Michigan needs a prototype of a model to learn from, and determine what type of performance we can achieve in this model. Kent County, the 17th Circuit Court, network180 and local private agencies believe that this national best practice can be replicated in Michigan. But before we do that, we need the tools to make it happen, which is what SB975 provides.

Last, we appreciate the work of Senator Caswell, Representative MacGregor, their various staff, the many representatives of DHS, our Court, network180 and all of the private agencies that have contributed to date on all of the various work products.

A significant opportunity lies in front of us to improve the outcomes for children, and we desire a chance to make good on it.